

NAXOS
AudioBooks

JUNIOR
CLASSICS



Grahame • Nesbit
Dragon Tales

THE RELUCTANT DRAGON
THE ISLAND OF THE NINE WHIRLPOOLS
THE FIERY DRAGON
THE LAST OF THE DRAGONS

Read by **Bertie Carvel**
and **Emma Gregory**

NA294912D

1	The Reluctant Dragon by Kenneth Grahame	4:37
2	Charlotte took me across another field or two...	4:19
3	Long ago – might have been hundreds of years ago...	6:30
4	Next day, after he'd had his tea...	4:48
5	The dragon coloured slightly and looked away.	4:00
6	What the boy feared, however, soon came to pass.	7:06
7	The villagers were straggling homewards...	5:42
8	'I've brought a friend to see you dragon,' said the boy...	7:10
9	Next morning, the people began streaming up to the downs...	5:03
10	The dragon was employing the interval...	5:04
11	There were great doings when they got down to the village...	6:02
12	'Here we are at your gate,' said the man abruptly...	2:32
13	The Island of the Nine Whirlpools by Edith Nesbit	5:06
14	When the Queen got home...	3:25

15	The next day his plan was all arranged...	4:43
16	Now, after more scores of years than you would like to add up...	3:09
17	So, on the eighth day...	5:29
18	And every day the Princess came to see Nigel...	4:18
19	When the griffin fell asleep that afternoon...	4:00
20	The Fiery Dragon by Edith Nesbit	4:57
21	Then, quite suddenly, a cloud passed over the sun...	5:26
22	When he awoke it was dark.	3:46
23	So Elfin sat down again...	3:44
24	The Princess could not walk through the streets...	5:04
25	'We've saved the country,' said the Princess...	5:41
26	The Last of the Dragons by Edith Nesbit	3:27
27	And the days and years went on...	5:35
28	The Prince and Princess looked at each other.	6:06

Total time: 2:17:07

Grahame • Nesbit

Dragon Tales

For eight hours a day, five days a week, for much of his working life, Kenneth Grahame worked in the Bank of England. He wore a suit and travelled into the bank in the morning with the other workers. It seems that he was good at his job: he started at the bottom at the age of 19, and rose to become the Bank Secretary, which was a senior post.

It was not always a steady working life. One day, a man came into the bank and fired three shots directly at Grahame, for no apparent reason. Fortunately the bullets all missed, and the man was taken to a mental hospital.

For the most part, however, Grahame seemed to live a calm working life. Yet behind this 'normal' bank worker was a man with an imagination which was happier in a childish world. He dreamed of childhood fun out in the countryside – by rivers, on the banks, under willow

trees – and actually collected toys of all kinds – fluffy and wooden – which always surprised visitors to his London home. Sometimes his two parallel lives overlapped: he was known to make notes about children's adventures and write short poems... in the bank ledgers!

The Wind in the Willows, which became one of the most popular children's books, was published in 1908; but Grahame had developed a reputation for endearing tales well before then. At the age of 34 he had published his first collection of stories, called *Pagan Papers* (1893); and this had been followed by *The Golden Age* in 1895 and *Dream Days* in 1898. In most of the stories, the children are seen to live in a world of their own, very different from the adult experience. It led him eventually to create the world of Mole and Badger and Toad.

The Reluctant Dragon was the big-hit

story in the *Dream Days* collection, and one can see why it was so successful. This is no aggressive, fire-breathing dragon out to terrorise town and countryside (which is expected from the deeply embedded image found in tales of armoured knights rescuing princesses). Instead, Grahame's dragon is a homely, quietly spoken animal who just wants to live in his cave and write poetry. And, of course, only children understand him. It is through the intervention of children that St George is persuaded not to heed the protestations of the villagers (who just want to see a good fight and a dragon lanced to death) and listen, instead, to the boy who has befriended the scaly poet. It is a tale of enduring charm, thanks to the skill and imagination of this very special bank manager.

Edith Nesbit also loved dragons. In fact, she wrote a whole book of dragon stories called *The Book of Dragons*. Born in 1858, a year before Grahame, Nesbit was a very different personality. She lived an unconventional, even wild, life; she married twice, living in France, Spain and Germany as well as England, and

had three children as well as lots of close friends. Stories for children poured out of her – she published more than 60 books before her death in 1924, including many which remain popular today: *The Treasure Seekers* (1898), *The Wouldbegoods* (1899), *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904), *The Railway Children* (1906) and *The Enchanted Castle* (1907).

The Book of Dragons was originally published in 1900 and contained eight stories, including *The Island of the Nine Whirlpools* and *The Fiery Dragon*. Nesbit may have been inspired by *The Reluctant Dragon*, since *The Book of Dragons* appeared just two years after Grahame's *Dream Days* collection; but Nesbit had a lively imagination of her own and these are engaging stories.

There is a delightful inscription in *The Book of Dragons* addressed to a young girl, Rosamund. She was the child of a relationship between Nesbit's husband, Hubert Bland, and Alice Hoatson, but Nesbit brought up the girl in her own family.

Nesbit's inscription reads:

*To Rosamund,
chief among those for whom
these tales are told,
The Book of Dragons is dedicated
in the confident hope
that she, one of these days,
will dedicate a book
of her very own making
to the one who now bids
eight dreadful dragons
crouch in all humbleness
at those little brown feet.*

The Last of the Dragons was written towards the end of Nesbit's life. It is one of the most interesting of the set, with its strong character of the Princess who tells both the Prince and the dragon what to do. It shows something of the author's own strong character, and it also brings together the age-old legend of flying dragons with the relatively new phenomena of flying machines – i.e. aeroplanes!

Notes by Nicolas Soames



Bertie Carvel has worked extensively in theatre, television and radio. His theatre credits include: *Parade* at the Donmar Warehouse, *The Man of Mode*, *The Life of Galileo* and *Coram Boy*, all at the National Theatre, and *Revelations* at the Hampstead Theatre. He has appeared in *John Adams*, *Doctor Who*, *Holby City* and *Agatha Christie: A Life in Pictures* on television. His radio credits include: *Rock 'n' Roll*, *Breaking Point*, *Diary of a Nobody* (among many others) for radio. He has previously read *The Great Poets: Percy Bysshe Shelley* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Emma Gregory has enjoyed an extensive and varied career. Some of her many radio titles include: *The Diary Of Samuel Pepys*, *Don Quixote* (with Paul Schofield), *The Bell*, *In The Native State* (with Peggy Ashcroft), *Dombey And Son*, *The Quatermass Memoirs* (with Andrew Keir) and *Great Expectations*. Emma has also recorded Shakespeare on CD for Riverrun Productions and the soundtrack of *The Beggars Opera* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. She works regularly as a voiceover artist for various companies, including the History and Biography channels. This is her first recording for Naxos AudioBooks.

**The music on this recording is taken from
the NAXOS and MARCO POLO catalogues**

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GLAZUNOV THE SEASONS, OP. 67 Slovak RSO/Ondrej Lenárd	8.550079

Music programming by Sarah Butcher

Credits

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Edited by Malcolm Blackmoor
Music programming by Sarah Butcher

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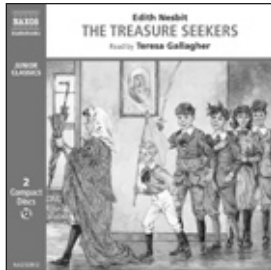
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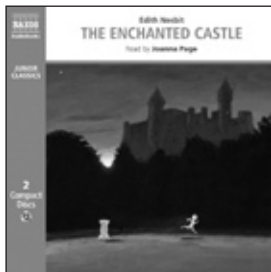
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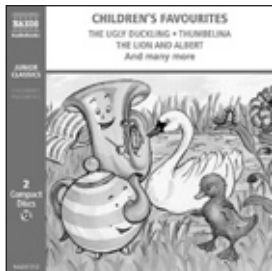
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Grahame • Nesbit

Dragon Tales

THE RELUCTANT DRAGON • THE ISLAND OF THE NINE WHIRLPOOLS
THE FIERY DRAGON • THE LAST OF THE DRAGONS

Read by **Bertie Carvel** and **Emma Gregory**

Tradition says that dragons come in many shapes and sizes but they all breathe fire, whisk fierce, scaly tails and frighten the local villagers.

Whenever they can, they capture princesses and take them to their caves. But this is not always the case. In these four delightful stories, Kenneth Grahame and Edith Nesbit introduce some very different kinds of dragons. One, for example, just wants to sit quietly in his cave and write poetry and really doesn't want to fight St George; in another story, the princess is more strong-minded than the dragon! So prepare to be surprised by the dragons you meet on this recording!

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Produced by
Nicolas Soames

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